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A CANADIAN NATIONAL SPIRIT.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION

OF

St. Andrew's Church, Montreal,

On December 8th, 1873,

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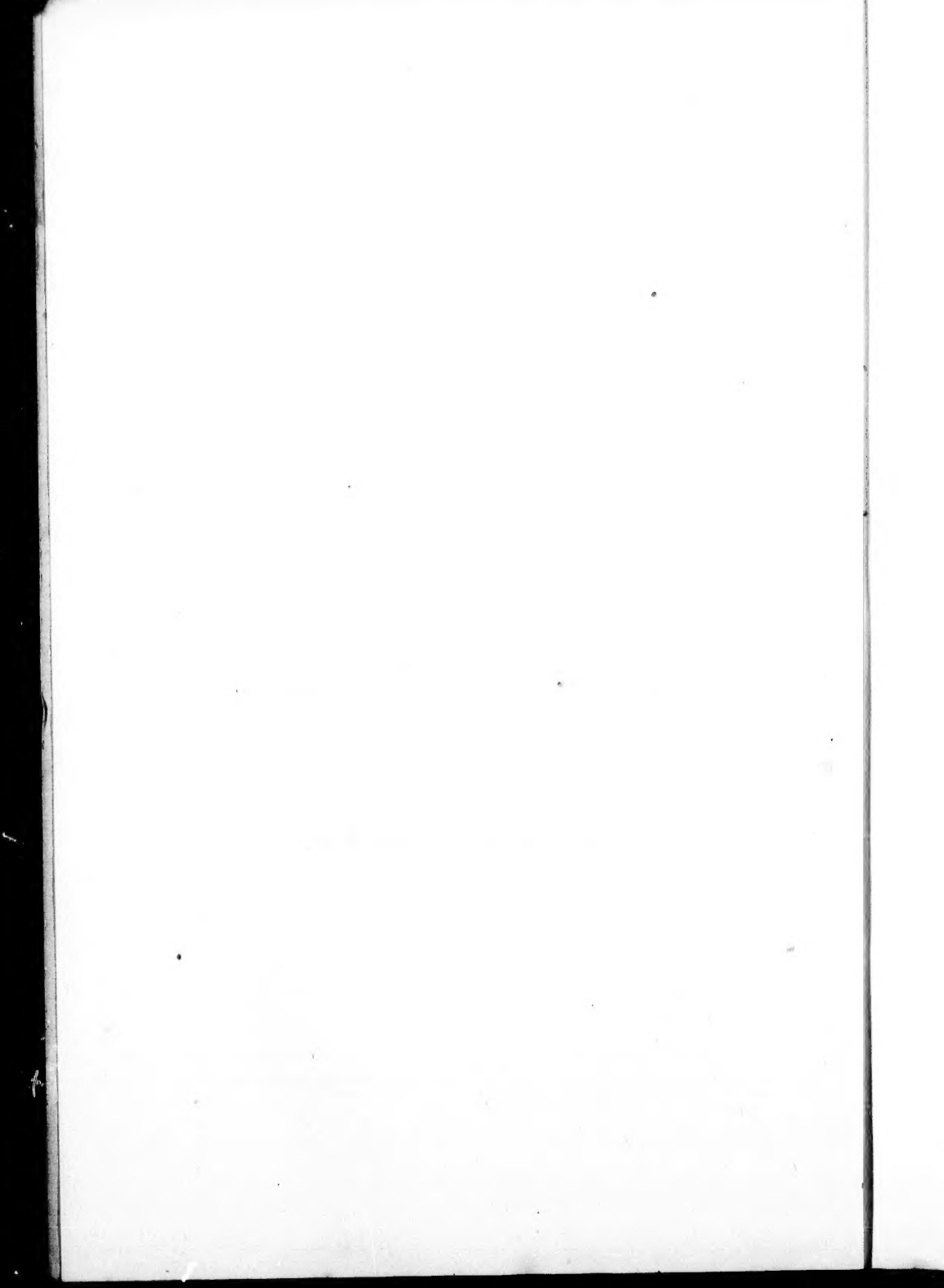
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*A Lecture delivered before the Young Men's Association of
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This subject has an especial interest to us young men. Though most of us, it may be, are now in subordinate places in the various walks of life here, from among our ranks must in time emanate many of the future leaders in the politics, the professions, the literature and the commerce of the Dominion, and all of us—each in his own sphere—will exercise a greater or less influence in moulding the future of our country. There are, no doubt, many who think that the parts which they could play in their country's progress would be so humble as to pass unnoticed. But it is not so. There is no man who works earnestly and honourably, whatever his position may be, who has not a useful place in the complex machinery of the nation's advancement.

The position of Canada, socially, commercially and politically, has undergone remarkable changes during the past quarter of a century.

Education has, fostered by a good system, been placed almost everywhere within the reach of the very poorest, and now, as years pass on, is bearing its fruit in the higher status of society, and in the more energetic, intelligent youth who are yearly swelling the ranks of commercial and professional life. In our legislatures, the men of educated talent rise to positions of power, and less seldom do we find there the ignorant demagogue, who so often has the reins of influence in a young, rapidly-settling country. Between those who hold different political views—particularly observable in the Press—there is a more courteous bearing—not yet all that is desirable—which a higher education and a greater refinement among the people could alone have produced.

Commerce has made vast strides ; our wealth as a people has enormously increased ; and the commercial relations which to-day exist between Canada on the one hand and Great Britain and the United States, and more than one foreign nation on the other, are of the most important nature. Year by year, this commercial progress has told its own tale. As the wealth and population have increased, the imports from other countries have assumed corresponding proportions, and the exports have, through the enterprise of our merchants in diverting the Western trade to the St. Lawrence route, and the development which has taken place in Canada's own resources, taken gigantic strides. This progress, in connection with the extensive maritime interests of the Dominion, has excited the attention of nations. The country is now an extensive customer in, as well as contributor to, the markets of the world.

Political changes have been even greater. Provinces with separate governments, interests to a considerable extent distinct, and in one instance with a people largely of a different language, have thrown those interests into one common lot, and now, with united energies and aims, form a Confederation, which, in the extent of the territory comprised under its government, is only exceeded by one power, and though not yet comparatively large in the number of its population, is already, in the broad views of its rulers and the enterprise of its people, giving promise of a future nation.

To the effects of this political union upon us as a people, and to the position in which it places each one of us as citizens, I would wish to draw attention.

There were many in all of the Provinces who were bitterly opposed to Confederation. A strong difference of opinion as to its probable advantages prevailed, and the anti-confederate party, it is well known, was wanting in neither numbers nor influence. Six years have, however, since passed by, and what to-day is the prevailing thought regarding the results of Confederation ? I venture to assert that its greatest opponents have been taken aback at these results. Four Provinces comprised the original partnership, two others have

since joined their destinies with it, and a fifth has been created. If this Confederation had alone fostered and cemented a great commercial union, if it had alone taught us to look to ourselves as great sources of supply and demand, it would have accomplished much. But it has been productive of other results, nobler, because removed above the mere question of gain, and more personal to each one of us, because of their relations to our social and moral well being. This union has drawn together more closely the people of the different provinces into common views and aims, irrespective of origin or creed; a fraternal feeling among them has been engendered; there has been formed a social union, so to speak, and what, from a political point of view, is of great importance, a national sentiment has sprung up. Thrown more upon their own resources now, an independent, self reliant spirit is beginning to be developed among the people. They now look more than formerly to themselves as a source of energy and power quite apart from the relations they possess to the Mother Country. There is a growing consciousness in their own ability as a people, and they have begun to realize the vastness of the resources lying broadcast around them awaiting development—whole provinces in extent untouched by the tiller's plough, great water courses to be better utilized as arteries from the interior of the Continent to the sea, mines requiring judgment and energy to expose their wealth, and a population with an intelligence to be made more general by the spread of education, and with tastes to be cultivated by the encouragement of literary enterprise. This is the spirit which gradually developed in individual character, will, in time, bear its marked impress collectively upon the people. The infusion of a national spirit carries with it the development of energy, and energy in each one of us means the country's progress. It must be our aim to awaken and foster this spirit, if we would rise above commercial, social, and political lethargy.

It may be supposed that our evident progression in sentiment, as well as material well being, is significant of an early independence. I do not think so, nor is there any large

section of the community which entertains that view. The manhood of Canada, when it must watch over its own progress, and, unaided, fight its own way on the arena of the world, will be attained in its own good time. There are responsibilities connected with it, for the full undertaking of which we are, at present, unprepared. And with a loyalty which glows in every Canadian heart, we are loath to dis sever connection with the country to which we are bound by the closest ties of birth, affection and language. Are not there the homes of our forefathers where they lived and died—there the scenes of the glorious battles which they fought for a liberty of thought and action, which we, in the new world, inherit? Great Britain has seen this Colony of hers when in its infancy, has watched over it as it grew up into youth, and when it shall have attained the full vigor and maturity of manhood, if there must be a separation, it is because the time has fully come when the Colony must, unaided, carve out its own future. With the vast natural resources which we have of ocean and inland seas, of fields and forests and mines, and with a population increasing year by year in numbers, in enterprise and in intelligence, the time will come when the relations of parent and offspring, however kindly they may remain, will of necessity, with such a breadth of ocean between them, be of a different type from those of early years. Maturity of years and self consciousness of ability, give a man an independence of spirit and a self reliance which prompt him to cast aside the timidity of youth, and to cope with the world himself. It is much the same with provinces like our own. Similar phases are gone through until the people, self-dependent and fearless, appear before the world as the new born nation. When that period will have arrived in our case, it is not our purpose to prophecy. We can merely keep in view its possibility, fit ourselves for its responsibilities, and leave its realization or not to the All-Disposer of events; and whilst cherishing feelings of warm attachment to Great Britain, we ought well to bear in remembrance that Great Britain's prestige is heightened by her Colony's progress, and that, as a distinguished writer has fitly put it, the greatest tribute which

Canada can pay to the position and power of the Mother Country, is to become itself a great nation.

We are often taunted, and hitherto not without reason, by our neighbours with a want of energy as a people, and with an apathy in matters which affect our personal interests and our country's progress. Journalists among them have told us that there was in us a want of a sense of nationality, that the majority of us did not seem to know to whom we belonged, and that the Provincial spirit, with its petty vanities and still more petty prejudices, was the characteristic of the people. These charges are to some extent too true. In our Parliaments and Legislatures, local or often insignificant questions frequently kindle the flames of strife, and even when great questions affecting the nation's interests are brought up, party feeling is too often allowed to sway the judgment. The members of a party will vote in a solid phalanx on a measure, seemingly irrespective of its merits, simply because it is made by themselves a party measure, or because the opposite side introduced it; and how often are religious prejudices and sectional feeling allowed to intervene when the development of national concerns is involved. This should not be. There is sore need for a patriotic spirit among us—a spirit that will rise above the considerations of party, sectional antagonism, religion and race.

Are there not, also, too many among us who hesitate to acknowledge Canadian mental calibre and Canadian workmanship, not for any apparent want of merit, but simply because they are Canadian?—as if there was neither genius nor skill here worth encouraging. And what, for example, are the prizes we have hitherto offered to native literary effort? Too often an unpaid publisher's bill for piles of books lying still unsold on his shelves, or a magazine with articles of considerable merit, but with a limited circulation, because the literary public will frequently not look beyond the native birth of the work.

I have met with and also heard of men in this country of ours, who, if there be a meaning in words, seemed ashamed of being Canadians. They are, fortunately, not numerous

now; but it is a pity that the country has to tolerate such men. It would be interesting to know how much their energy has contributed to its progress. Those who are ashamed of their country are undeserving the protection of its laws. If it is the land of their adoption, why came they here, or why do they remain? Ashamed of our nationality! We have reason to rejoice at the progress of the past few years, and the next decade will afford greater reason. A nation's success and its rank as a power have sometimes to do with the pride which its less active people take in speaking of it as their own, but among merchants, manufacturers and politicians, down to the most humble mechanic, there will often be found a better foundation for pride—a national sentiment, not, perhaps, unmixed, in the case of a successful man, with a natural feeling of satisfaction that he has himself contributed in some degree to the nation's prosperity. And what are the effects of this? There are no two countries where there is more energy displayed at home, and whose names are a greater power on every continent, than Great Britain and the United States. And why? One reason certainly is that the British merchant, whether at home or abroad, among his own people or in the presence of foreigners, impersonates, in his words and acts, the position and character of his nation; and the same may be said of the American, with, in some respects, perhaps even greater force. Here in our midst we have seen the dawn of this sense of nationality, which we trust will soon become a full noontide in development.

As in every new country a very considerable part of the population is foreign, and it is, perhaps, natural that the land of each one's birth and early years should have some ties of connection which it is hard to sever. Memories of early associations are difficult to obliterate. There is a tendency, however, to carry this national feeling too far. In the land of adoption no difference of race should for a moment be allowed to sway the judgment in matters where the interests of the adopted country are alone at stake. And yet do we not find it, in this country and the United States, of almost daily occurrence? In political contests are there not men elected to

Parliament and Congress, not on the ground of high moral character and executive ability, but for the sake, it would seem, of the land of the candidate's birth? I am strongly of opinion that if a man permanently leaves his native land for another country, it is from motives of choice or duty; and I further look upon it, from the time of his arrival, as a duty which he owes to his adopted land, quite apart from his own self interest, to lend his best energies in the development of its resources. Each man will find his own particular sphere of active work in this respect. Whether Irish, Scotch, or English, French or German, it matters not here. In this land these nationalities are all blended in the one word "Canadian." We are not engaged in our busy occupations here, whether of a public or personal nature, that we may strengthen the hands and build up the destinies of Scotland, or Ireland, or Germany. Our country is Canada. We are here because we like it, or because duty calls us; and one of the noblest ambitions that we could have, apart from plain duty or interest, is to unite our energies in the one common aim of building up, stone upon stone, a progressive country here. We may have powerful neighbours, but we are not weak, and they were not long since but as we are now. Their success in the attainment of position and power must only infuse confidence in us, and stimulate us to develop the energies which we know are in us. Let us strive individually to attain this end. I think that it is a noble reflection, open to each one of us in after life when recurring to the events gone by, to feel that our country, and particularly our immediate sphere of active work, have been the better because that we have lived.

We are surrounded by circumstances which should make us feel that there is a future before us—that on our prairies, in our forests, our mines, and our fisheries, and in the genius and vigor of our own people, there are the foundations of a material greatness requiring only to be built upon. The man who constantly feels that he has ability in him lying ready at his will, and has the proper spirit in him to develop that ability, is likely to make his mark in the world. Those with whom he is brought into contact are made to feel that he has

that ability, and to respect him in consequence. When difficulties present themselves, that self will and self consciousness of power enable him to grapple with them. Difficulties, if not superhuman, seem only made to be overcome, or to tempt individual energy to surmount them. It is not different with us as a colonial dependency. We are conscious of great natural resources; we have a conviction that a bright future, dependent, however, on our foresight and energy, lies before us. Why should we not have in us the spirit of a nation? Why should we not set aside all differences of class, of creed, and of language, and all petty political wranglings, to work in the common cause of realizing that future? Every association we have should promote this spirit. In the New World nature is developed on a scale of greatness. There are mighty rivers, rising in the interior of the Continent hundreds of miles from the seaboard, vast lakes that are rather inland seas, long mountain ranges, lofty peaks, broad water falls, and towering trees. The mineral wealth is even more than commensurate with these in variety and extent. The American mind has also in some degree its equivalent character,—in its maturity, whilst yet in youth, in its comprehensive grasp of vast schemes, and in its energy and determination. But we have other associations to foster this spirit. Have we not the success of the Anglo-Saxon wherever he has settled? and have we not before us Great Britain's direct encouragement as well as its example of energy, sterling honor and success?

We are accustomed to allude to patriotism as one of the nobler traits of heroic character, and to revere the memories of those whose lives have been made illustrious by zealous service in their country's cause. But it does not require acts which the world would call great to make each one a patriot. The same opportunities are not, nor are the same means to take advantage of opportunities, afforded to all. Each, however, in his own path will find ample ways—some of them small, and he may think insignificant—nevertheless ways in which he may further his country's interests. Every deed performed, every word spoken, and, I might go further and

say, every thought which passes through man's busy brain—for deeds and words are directly or indirectly but the expressions of thoughts—bears its impress on the outer world for good or evil, greater or less, according to its character, and to surrounding circumstances. Cast a stone into the river: outwards spread from the common centre, constantly enlarging circle after circle of ripples, which may approach and break on the shore at your feet, but away beyond they roll outwards until imperceptibly they are lost on the surface of the water, the effect being prolonged or shortened as the ripples are smaller or larger, the water ruffled or smooth. So it is with the thoughts and words and acts of every day life. In many instances their effects may not extend beyond the individual, though even there, in the case of thoughts, they may have their wider influence through subsequent resulting thoughts or acts. There is, however, no man who cannot, from his own lifetime's experience, speak of the constant influence which each individual, even the most humble, wields for good or evil through what he says or does, and the increased means at the present day for diffusing thought, have vastly extended this influence. Let each one bear this in mind, that he has it in this way in his power to accomplish much. It does not require immediate position and power to do something for our country's service, though upon those who have these, the responsibility that rests is great. The public spirit of a few can accomplish great reforms, and what vast aims cannot be reached if we all strive, hand in hand, in the good work? Let no man say that there is not a wide sphere in which he can direct his energies; or give as a reason for apathy, that there is not room for the attainment of every one's ambition. All men, it is true, cannot reach to positions of influence, but it is equally true that no man will attain such positions who will not work hard and earnestly. But more than this. It is noteworthy that the opportunities for work are on the constant increase. Even more in a young progressive Dominion like ours, than among the older nations, do we find it true, that as the world rolls onward, and each country's resources are developed, and science and skill on every hand lend their new attainments to

the learning of the past, so will the range for thought extend, the scope for active energy be enlarged, and the opportunities for each man's earnest effort be increased.

I have spoken of the dawn of a national spirit amongst Canadians. The masses of the people, however, have apparently not yet fully awakened to a sense of it. They are seemingly still in a condition of lethargy, from which they require to be aroused. But to effect this, is the work of time. A national spirit is not like a fungus growth, which appears to-day in all its development, where yesterday there was nothing but soil. It can, however, be infused more rapidly among the masses, if we strive to excite it. The people can be educated into it, and in the public spirit and enterprise of our representatives, and the influence wielded by the press in moulding public opinion, there are most effective media for accomplishing this purpose. An example of energy evinced by a nation's rulers in promoting measures for the country's advancement, backed by a progressive tone in the press, will excite strong emulation among the people. Our governments appear now to be more alive to their responsibilities in this matter. The old fogy conservatism, and contracted ideas of years ago, have in our parliaments given way to more liberalism, and to more enlarged views which make the future hopeful. But, as I have already said, we young men have an especial interest in this matter. From the present younger ranks of life must, in time, be drawn much of the calibre of the country. In youth we are more susceptible of new and permanent impressions, and as incidents of that period of life, we have more energy to pave the way for success, and more enthusiasm to make us love the work we are engaged in. If this spirit is carried by each one of us into every day life, it will bear its valued fruit in the course of years in an apparently new generation of energetic, public spirited citizens. This is the class of people which the country needs on every farm and in every village and city.

It is still a source of regret, that at times there is so much partisanship displayed, notably by the press. The lines are very finely drawn between political parties at the present

moment. Conservatives are anxious to be thought liberal, and the Liberals we find marking out for themselves an even more conservative policy than their opponents have adopted. In the face of this, how often do our editors on both sides of politics—especially as each election season comes around—seem to vie with each other which shall pour out the more unmerited abuse on parties and individuals who hardly differ from them in political opinion, and take the most narrow-minded view of every scheme which their opponents have developed. This course is unworthy of the present days of enlightenment and wide spread education, and is inconsistent with the desire which should everywhere inspire the press—of elevating the moral tone of the people, and inciting them to high and noble resolves in regard to the future of the Dominion.

And now when these old party lines in our legislatures are practically swept away, when those who are at present in power have come into office on the watchword of political purity, which all should have, and when so many parts of the country need much the infusion of more life and energy into them, is there not strong ground for a new political creed in which all parties could safely forget their differences, and whose great principles would be unity of the confederation, a higher moral status for society, and the cultivation of a sense of nationality among the people that would incite in them noble aspirations regarding the intellectual and material future of the Dominion. I confess to having a strong sympathy with many of the principles of that proposed new party organization, destined yet to be of influence in our midst, which is being now fostered in western Ontario. The ideas developed thus far are perhaps crude, and some of them will need emendation, but, they indicate generally the opinion of a large class of the more thoughtful among the rising generation in the Dominion, and if the inspiring motives in adopting these ideas are love to Canada and a desire for Canadian progress, it is not because we love the old land the less, but because with increasing intelligence and enlarging sympathies, we love the new the better.